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NINE CONVICTED IN 'SOUTHERN COMFORT' TRIAL
ATLANTA

The first trial stemming from indictments in four cities in what federal authorities say was the largest cocaine ring in U.S. history has ended in the convictions of nine people.

A U.S. District Court jury that heard nine weeks of testimony was in its third day of deliberations when it returned the guilty verdicts and found one person innocent Friday. The charges were filed as part of an 18-month investigation called "Operation Southern Comfort."

The trial grew out of a series of indictments returned against 53 people in January by federal grand juries in Atlanta, Los Angeles, Miami and Little Rock, Ark.

Those charged here were part of a smuggling operation that brought 5 tons of cocaine into the United States in 14 months, the indictment said.

Former bail bondsman Harold Rosenthal, 53, the alleged head of the ring, was convicted of two counts of racketeering, one count of running a continuing criminal enterprise, seven counts of importing cocaine into the United States, and four counts of possession of cocaine with intent to distribute.

"It's like having your heart taken right out of you," said Rosenthal attorney R.C. Coughill, adding that he would spend the next couple days "assessing what legal avenues are open."

Rosenthal claimed he had CIA approval to smuggle drugs from Colombia in an attempt to learn about connections between Colombian Marxists and the Soviet Union. He claimed the CIA helped him escape in 1981 from a federal prison in Memphis, Tenn., where was serving time for a drug conviction.

Sergio Basilo Pantoja-Zenezs, 38, of Davie, Fla., was found innocent of one count of racketeering.

Philip A. Bonadonna, 51, of Coral Gables, Fla., was convicted of running a continuing criminal enterprise, two counts of racketeering and six other drug-related charges.

Robert E. Dunleavy Jr., 41, of Coral Springs, Fla., was convicted on two counts of racketeering, three counts of importing cocaine and two of possession of cocaine with intent to distribute.

The jury also found: George Lombardi, 34, of Margate, Fla., guilty on four counts; Garland H. Watson, 49, of Rockwood, Tenn., guilty on three counts and innocent on five counts; Larry Roger Stewart, 34, of Dalton, guilty on one count of racketeering and innocent on two other counts; Dennis Wayne Wilson, 26, of White Lake Township, Mich., guilty on one count of racketeering and innocent on six other counts; Rose Marie Auvento Junker, 49, of Philadelphia, guilty of three counts and innocent of two counts; and Joseph Vincent Junker, 51, of Philadelphia, guilty on three counts and innocent on two counts.

U.S. District Judge G. Ernest Tidwell set sentencing for the week of Nov. 26.

Twenty other people were named in the Atlanta indictment. Some have not been arrested; others will be tried later.